

My name is Ryan Willingham. I am a college student and self-employed artist. Additionally, I have high hopes and dreams of making a career in the music business, therefore, localism in radio is something that is very near and dear to me. Localism is about diversity, originality and even integrity. It also includes a sense of pride that, if missing, goes against everything this country is all about. In order to continue the once prosperous relationship between community, radio, and musicians that has been progressively corrupted, more steps must be taken to protect and promote localism.

Being a musician from Texas, where the mixture of local music and local pride is a part of everyday life, I cannot accurately express in writing my displeasure of national playlists and DJ voice-overs. These practices totally oppose the whole idea of localism. Not only are listeners having music crammed down their throats and being told what is good, they are essentially being brainwashed by pre-recorded "talking heads" that have no clue and care nothing about who is even listening. In an effort to decrease costs and increase revenue and ratings, it is my opinion that some radio stations are "selling out," and missing the whole point of the community-radio-musician relationship mentioned earlier. The community and musician base take the brunt of this twisted, yet very common and accepted new trend in radio. Rather than worrying about how many times they can multiply their overhead and how much control they can have, radio stations need to consider their real purpose and why they were given a broadcast license in the first place. There is so much more to music than what is considered popular and, there is so much more to radio than what is considered profitable.

The nasty practice of accepting payola in exchange for airtime makes me sick. Although this activity is illegal, it happens, and especially through the use of a liaison, that acts as a third-party. Anyway you slice it, this is still payola, perhaps in an even dirtier form. This example of corruptness is just one reason why radio stations should focus more on localism and being true to their community, rather than centering their efforts on making the most money they can. I believe third-party payola should be outlawed, and more steps should be taken to insure that everyone gets equal opportunity and equal access to the airwaves. Although the radio industry is a business, and businesses are entitled to make their money, they need to focus more on what really matters. These program directors need to realize that the airwaves belong to the public and that their listeners should come first and foremost, before any monetary gain. Realistically, a channel should consider its gains as a function of how well the listening public is served. In order for all parties involved in a relationship to succeed, there must be a balance of benefits for everyone. Because musicians and music providers rely on radio for expression, and the community relies on the radio to serve its people's needs, everyone in the system wins. However, with recent major conglomerating of radio stations, and record labels, there is no longer a balance of benefits. This is sad, considering that the only people that end up winning are the huge conglomerates and record labels. Everyone financially under these two groups gets the "shaft." Essentially, the quality of broadcasting and consideration of public needs take a backseat to the station's greedy money making.

For example, consider the DFW area where I live, rich in local music and culture, and housing a large population of country music listeners-many of those who are disgruntled with the current state of country music. We now have three major country music stations, all of which have very similar playlists, and we have numerous low power stations, that play a mixture of pop-country, regional music, and "rootsy" local music. The major conglomerates suck the diversity and originality right out of an area, but the emergence and increasing popularity of the smaller, locally-focused stations is a breath of fresh air for myself, and the many other disgruntled country fans in the area. Thankfully, the major market radio stations are now setting aside a few hours a week, usually one night of the weekend, to do a "Texas music show." These shows are a great thing for local musicians and their fan bases (which can be surprisingly large in number). Of the shows I am aware of, all of the DJs live and breathe the local music scene and have a passion for the message they are trying to convey. This refreshing idea should be modeled and encouraged throughout the rest of the country. Many of the smaller, lower-powered stations are taking this model and integrating it into their daily programming, allowing the portion of the community seeking this kind of music to be served continually.

Although the channels that rake in the most money are the major pop-country stations, as a musician, the smaller and locally-based channels are more important local musicians and their fans. These underappreciated artists and underserved audiences are finally getting the opportunity to be heard and to express their differences. In my opinion, there is no problem with the state of country music. There are plenty of awesome talents that I have been exposed to in my area, and I'm sure that is the case all over the country. The problem lies in the business of corporate radio and their willingness to turn their back on good music and the very people that listen to their programming.

This is why I think ascertainment should be a vital part of a radio stations agenda. Just like the artists that need to be heard, there are masses of people in this country that have voices too. These people need to be listened to and taken into consideration. In an effort to promote localism, radio stations need to consider their listeners opinions and provide broadcasting that best serves their needs and desires. Done successfully, the practice of ascertainment can lead to a more balanced community-radio-musician model. Because all areas of the country contain very diverse people, even within small towns and cities, the programming based on ascertainment most likely will be diverse and have many different aspects, but this is what radio and localism is all about: putting the community first. After all, the radio waves do belong to the public, so they should be utilized accordingly.

In conclusion, I'd like to say that the direction radio is going is not only unappealing to me as a fan of music, but it also is quite saddening to an aspiring musician, who is unwilling to give up his beliefs and "sell out" on a career. Although I am just beginning in this business and won't even have an album for another 9 months to a year, these issues surrounding localism in radio are very near to my heart and my dreams. The fostering and support of localism might be the difference in whether I'm lucky enough to continue pursuing my career in music. Just think, during

the 1970's progressive country movement, if Willie Nelson would have acted like the conglomerate radio stations of today and sold out just for monetary gain, look at the genius and icon of originality this world would have missed. I'm asking the FCC to continue its efforts of encouraging and fostering localism, so that dreamers like me have the chance to be heard and appreciated, just like Willie Nelson did.